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New York

President:	Mr. Van Oosterom	(Netherlands)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Dah
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Temenov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Miller

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. Mladenov is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Jerusalem.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Recalling the Security Council's latest note 507 on its working methods (S/2017/507), I wish to encourage all participants, both members and non-members of the Council, to deliver their statements in five minutes or less. Note 507 also encourages briefers to be succinct and to focus on key issues. Briefers are further encouraged to limit initial remarks to agreed time limits.

I now give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: On behalf of the Secretary-General, I devote my regular briefing on the situation in the Middle East today to introducing the fifth report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), covering the period from 18 December 2017 to 25 March 2018. I will focus on the developments on the ground in accordance with the provisions of the resolution, including on the regional and international efforts to advance the peace process.

Let me reiterate from the outset that developments on the ground cannot be divorced from the broader context of continued military occupation of Palestinian territory, uncertainties about the future of the peace process and the two-State solution, unilateral actions that undermine peace efforts, and continued turmoil in the wider region.

Allow me to also express my continued concern over the $446-million funding gap for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). It must be bridged urgently to ensure that UNRWA can provide basic services to Palestine refugees, including to school half a million children across the Middle East, until a just and lasting peace is achieved. I welcome the approximately $100 million pledged at the recent Extraordinary Ministerial Conference in Rome. I encourage Member States to consider urgently providing additional new funding for UNRWA's critical work.

In its paragraph 2, resolution 2334 (2016) calls on Israel to "immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem" and to fully respect all its legal obligations in this regard. No such steps were taken during the reporting period. I reiterate that the United Nations considers all settlement activities to be a violation of international law and a major obstacle to peace.

Israel advanced 22 plans for some 1,500 housing units in Area C settlements. Around a dozen units were approved for construction — significantly lower than the 1,200 units approved during the previous three-month period. Ten tenders for some 900 housing units in seven Area C settlements were also announced. Official figures released last week show that construction starts in Area C settlements declined in 2017 to nearly half the number of 2016, which was the highest in over a decade. The plans include 15 temporary housing units near Gush Etzion, south of Bethlehem, in an area outside the jurisdiction of nearby settlements. These units are planned for residents of the Netiv Ha'avot outpost whose homes are slated for demolition on 15 June.

In response to the January shooting attack that killed a rabbi from the Havat Gilad outpost, on 4 February the Israeli Government approved the establishment of a new settlement to absorb its residents. Havat Gilad is built almost entirely on privately owned Palestinian land.

In related potentially significant legislative developments, in January the Knesset passed an amendment to the Basic Law on Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. By requiring a super-majority of 80 votes in the Knesset, the change will make it more difficult for Israel to transfer territories that are currently within the Israeli-defined Jerusalem municipality boundaries to a future Palestinian State. Conversely, it also makes it somewhat easier to change those municipal boundaries, by lowering the previously required Knesset threshold to a simple majority. On 7 March, the Knesset also approved an amendment to Israel's law on entry to Israel, allowing the revocation of the permanent

residency status of Palestinians in East Jerusalem who are involved in terrorist activities, treason or espionage, as defined in Israeli law. On 25 February, the Government endorsed a bill transferring jurisdiction over certain categories of petitions related to decisions by Israeli authorities in the West Bank from the High Court of Justice to the Court for Administrative Affairs in Jerusalem. The bill's sponsors have described it as a step towards equating legal procedures and norms in the West Bank and Israel.

The Israeli authorities have continued to demolish Palestinian-owned structures across the occupied West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, albeit at last year's relatively low rate. Ninety-two structures, including 15 that were donor-funded, were demolished, for reasons that included a lack of building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain. As a result, 104 Palestinians, including 42 children, were displaced, affecting the livelihoods of more than 360 people. The demolition of two donor-funded classrooms serving 26 children in the Palestinian Bedouin community of Abu Nuwar was particularly worrying. For at least three years now, the United Nations has been warning that Israel has been putting steady pressure on Abu Nuwar residents to move. The community is in the strategic E-1 area planned for the expansion of Ma'ale Adumim, which would result in the creation of a continuous built-up area between the settlement and East Jerusalem, further dividing East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank.

Similarly, on 21 March the Bedouin village of Umm Al-Hiran also came under renewed threat as Israeli authorities posted eviction notices on homes indicating that evictions could take place at any time between 14 and 29 April. In late December, in the Masafer Yatta area of Hebron, where there are demolition orders on most structures, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) blocked several access routes and issued a military order requiring Palestinians to obtain permits to cross, limiting access to services and livelihoods for some 1,400 residents in 12 communities.

Turning to the persistent problem of violence, the reporting period was characterized by continuing demonstrations and clashes following the announcement on 6 December in which the United States recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital, and the growing tensions in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem and along the Gaza fence. Israeli security forces killed 23 Palestinians, including six children, in various incidents, including reported attacks against Israelis, demonstrations, clashes and military operations in the occupied Palestinian territory. Five Israelis — three civilians and two soldiers — were killed by Palestinians in separate attacks in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem. On 5 February, a resident of the Har Bracha settlement was stabbed to death at the entrance to the Ariel settlement. On 9 January, a rabbi from the Havat Gilad outpost was killed in a drive-by shooting. Two of the three alleged perpetrators were killed by Israeli security forces during subsequent search-and-arrest operations. On 18 March, an Israeli civilian was stabbed to death in Jerusalem's Old City. The alleged assailant, a Palestinian man from the West Bank town of Aqraba, was shot dead by Israeli security forces. On 10 March, a Palestinian teenager was shot dead during clashes with Israeli security forces and settlers in the village of Urif, after confrontations turned violent between Palestinian villagers and residents of the nearby Yitzhar settlement.

During the reporting period, there was a worrying escalation of violence in and around the Gaza Strip. Improvised explosive devices placed near the Gaza fence by Palestinian militants exploded on three occasions, wounding four Israeli soldiers in one incident on 17 February. On each occasion, Israeli forces responded with air strikes and shelling against Hamas targets. The Israeli military also announced that it had destroyed three tunnels either fully inside Gaza or leading from Gaza into Israeli territory. On 13 January, before the escalation, the IDF also destroyed a tunnel extending from Gaza into Israel and Egypt under the Kerem Shalom crossing. In addition, 33 rockets were fired from Gaza towards Israel, of which 11 landed in Israel itself. The IDF retaliated against Hamas military sites in Gaza. No injuries were reported on either side.

On 13 March, an improvised explosive device targeting the convoy of Palestinian Prime Minister Hamdallah and the Head of Palestinian General Intelligence exploded in Gaza, with minor injuries to six people. No one has claimed responsibility for that so far. On 22 March, Hamas security forces conducted an operation in the Nuseirat camp in Gaza, reportedly targeting the chief suspect in the bombing of the Prime Minister's convoy. During the operation, the suspect and an accomplice were critically wounded and later succumbed to their wounds. Two members of Hamas's security forces were also killed during the incident.

Despite the call in Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) for the parties to refrain from acts of

provocation, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric, such statements have continued. Fatah's official social-media pages continued to feature posts glorifying the perpetrators of past violence against Israeli civilians, including terror attacks that killed civilians and children. In addition, Palestinian officials continued to make statements denying the historical and religious connection of Jews to Jerusalem and its holy sites. One senior religious leader made the false claim that Jews had lived in historical Jerusalem for only 70 or 80 years. Others continue to describe Israel as a colonial project. I urge the Palestinian leadership to continue to speak out against violence in general and to condemn specific attacks against civilians. Senior Israeli officials also made provocative statements encouraging annexation of all or parts of the occupied West Bank and categorically rejecting the notion of a two-State solution. Some claimed that Palestinians are an invented people; others referred to Palestinians as bloodthirsty barbarians; and one political leader called for more injuries and deaths in Gaza, complaining that Israeli military strikes responding to rocket fire were not producing enough casualties among militants. I urge political leaders to refrain from provocative statements and actions that fuel an already tense environment.

Resolution 2334 (2016) reiterated the calls by the Middle East Quartet for affirmative steps to be taken to reverse negative trends on the ground that are imperilling a two-State solution. The period has witnessed both positive and negative actions by the parties in that regard. In January, after years of negotiations, Israel approved the operation of local Palestinian 3G service in the West Bank, allowing Palestinian telecommunications companies to offer higher speed data services and somewhat improve their competitiveness.

There were two high-level meetings, in Paris on 15 February between the Israeli and Palestinian Ministers of Economy, and on 19 February in Ramallah between the Israeli Minister of Finance and the Palestinian Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, aimed at discussing a range of economic and infrastructure issues concerning the West Bank and Gaza. On 18 February, Israel's Ministerial Committee for Legislation endorsed a bill that would allow Israel to withhold tax revenues that are collected by Israel on behalf of the Palestinian Authority. The amount withheld would be equivalent to the money used for payments to the families of Palestinian perpetrators of attacks on Israelis or for prisoners held in Israeli jails. On 5 March, the Knesset advanced a more restrictive version of the same bill.

Meanwhile, implementation of the intra-Palestinian agreement of 12 October between Fatah and Hamas has stalled. In February and March, Egypt hosted delegations from the two parties in an effort to advance the process of returning Gaza to the control of the Palestinian Authority. I also held multiple meetings with senior Palestinian and Egyptian officials in support of that process.

On 4 March, the Palestinian Government approved a $5.1 billion budget for 2018, while presenting the option that if it were empowered in Gaza, it could amend the budget and absorb up to 20,000 Gaza civil servants as well.

In Gaza, the electricity supply remains far below people's needs, with power cuts of up to 20 hours per day. Without emergency fuel, 55 sewage pools are at a significant risk of overflowing and the functioning of 48 water desalination plants has been reduced to around 20 per cent of their working capacity. Water is piped to households for only a few hours a day, every four or five days. Basic services continue to function thanks to United Nations-distributed, donor-funded fuel for generators, which is expected to last, at best, only until September. Over 40 per cent of essential medicines remain at zero stock due to the lack of funding.

After a 10-year delay, the Northern Gaza Emergency Sewage Treatment project finally began operating on 1 March, albeit at minimum capacity. More sustainable energy supply and other infrastructure projects need to be urgently pursued in order to allow it to function at full capacity.

In addition to a rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation, Gaza's economy remains on the brink of collapse. Urgent interventions, alongside increased commitment to short-, medium- and long-term projects, provided the basis for discussions at the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians on 20 March in Brussels. Two preparatory meetings — one in Cairo and the other in Washington, D.C., respectively — helped develop a series of priority engagements aimed at improving the electricity, water and health situations in Gaza.

A European Union (EU)-hosted pledging conference for the Gaza Central Desalination Plant, which also took place on 20 March, saw Member States commit some $565 million — nearly 80 per cent of the project's costs — thereby enabling the tendering process to begin. That is a positive development for the people and infrastructure of Gaza. Nevertheless, it is only one, albeit important project required to ensure that Gaza remains livable beyond the foreseeable future.

In a welcome development, over the past two months, Israel has approved thousands of pending residential cases, more than 130 private-sector projects and over 1,200 requests for the import of items that Israel considers to be of dual civilian and military use. On 14 February, at a trilateral meeting convened by the United Nations, Israel and the Palestinian Authority agreed to continue with the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism and conduct a joint review in order to improve the functionality, transparency and predictability of the Mechanism.

Resolution 2334 (2016) calls upon all States to distinguish in their relevant dealings between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. There are two developments to report in that regard. On 23 January, the Danish Parliament passed a resolution with reference to resolution 2334 (2016), and in line with European Union policy, urging that future agreements between Denmark and Israel clearly state their inapplicability to occupied territory and encouraging the Government to strengthen its guidance to private and public investors.

Also in January, the European Commission signed a financing agreement with Israel, allowing the latter's participation in the Joint Operational Programme of the Mediterranean Sea Basin Programme under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument for 2014-2020. In continuation of an existing EU practice, the agreement includes a territorial clause stating that

> "[i]n accordance with EU policy, the agreement shall not apply to the geographic areas that came under the administration of the State of Israel after 5 June 1967".

Regrettably, the reporting period saw no progress towards advancing the goal of a lasting peace, as also called for in the resolution.

On 31 January, Norway and the European Union convened an extraordinary meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, in which support for the two-State solution, in line with relevant United Nations resolutions, was reiterated. The participants stated their support for ongoing efforts to restore unity between the West Bank and Gaza under the control of the legitimate Palestinian Authority, by focusing, inter alia, on urgent projects that address pressing electricity, water and humanitarian needs.

Speaking before the Security Council on 20 February (see S/PV.8183), Palestinian President Abbas called for an international peace conference to be held by the middle of the year to form a multilateral mechanism in support of the parties to negotiate all permanent-status issues within a specific time frame and secure full United Nations membership for the State of Palestine and mutual recognition of Palestinian and Israeli statehood on the 1967 lines. On 23 February, the United States announced that it would move its embassy to Jerusalem on 14 May, which will coincide with the seventieth anniversary of Israel's declaration of independence.

In closing, I would like to share some broad observations concerning the provisions of the resolution on the reporting period.

First, Israel's illegal settlement expansion and related activities continue to further threaten the viability of the two-State solution and erode the prospects for peace. The latest decision to establish a new settlement — for the second time since the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), following Amihai in May 2017 — is particularly troubling. Meanwhile, Palestinian development remains extremely restricted. In Area C alone, there are nearly 13,000 outstanding demolition orders against Palestinian-owned structures, of which some 500 are ready for execution. Less than 1 per cent of Area C, comprising over 60 per cent of the West Bank and critical to the contiguity of a future Palestinian State, is available for Palestinian construction under approved plans.

Secondly, violence and incitement continue to fuel hatred, division, distrust and fear. Continuing terror attacks on Israelis and the attempt on the life of the Palestinian Prime Minister illustrate the growing risk of destabilization and the empowerment of radicals and extremists. The use of force by Israel must also be calibrated. Israel must uphold its responsibilities

under international human rights and humanitarian law. Lethal force should be used only as a last resort, with any resulting fatalities properly investigated by the authorities. I once again urge the security forces to exercise maximum restraint in order to avoid casualties.

I note the developing Palestinian plans for a march on the Gaza fence on 30 March. I call on all sides to exercise restraint and to take the necessary steps to avoid a violent escalation. It is imperative that civilians, in particular children, not be targeted and that all actors refrain from putting children at risk at any time. I also take this opportunity to reiterate my call on Hamas to provide full information on the two Israeli soldiers and two civilians who are being held in Gaza, as required by international humanitarian law.

Thirdly, steps taken on the ground in Area C and Gaza are welcome, but far from transformative. The relaxation on the import of certain dual-use items and the increased number of permits issued to business people in Gaza are nevertheless important developments that need to be sustained and augmented. Economic development, critical as it is, is no substitute for sovereignty and statehood. Efforts aimed at achieving both must proceed in parallel.

Fourthly, the terrorist attack against the convoy of Prime Minister Hamdallah in Gaza was a serious attempt to derail the Cairo process and its perpetrators must be brought to justice. In that respect, I call on Palestinian factions to engage earnestly with Egypt and move forward on the implementation of the Cairo agreement. That includes the paying of salaries for civil servants and the full empowerment of the Government in Gaza. A fully empowered Palestinian Authority in Gaza remains key to lifting the closures, alleviating the humanitarian and development crisis in Gaza, and furthering national aspirations for statehood.

I commend the Prime Minister's commitment to continuing his efforts towards reconciliation and commend Egypt for its tireless efforts in that regard. The United Nations remains committed to supporting Egyptian efforts to advance the process and welcomes the efforts of the international community for a more coordinated engagement in alleviating the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

I note with concern, however, that reports have emerged today, indicating that Hamas has set up a checkpoint at the Erez, or Beit Hanoun, crossing, which controls the entrance of national and international personnel into Gaza and the exit of all Gaza identification holders. As per the intra-Palestinian agreement of 12 October, all checkpoints should be handed over to the Palestinian Authority.

Fifthly, I remain greatly concerned by the state of our collective efforts to advance peace. Long-held international consensus positions on final status issues, including on Jerusalem and refugees, and United Nations principles must remain the guiding framework of a negotiated process towards the ultimate goal of a two-State solution. Any deviation from those principles would be dangerous. Resolution 2334 (2016) states in paragraph 3 that the Security Council

> "will not recognize any changes to the 4 June 1967 lines, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties through negotiations".

All final-status issues should be resolved on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions, bilateral agreements and international law.

As the Secretary-General has repeatedly reminded the Council, the United Nations strongly urges Israelis, Palestinians and the international community to take concrete measures that will reverse the current course of the conflict and advance the goal of a just and sustainable peace, based on the two-State solution. Generations of Palestinian and Israeli lives have been shaped by the conflict. It is time to begin building a different future, based on mutual respect, dignity and the belief that even the deepest and most painful divisions can be resolved if there is a genuine desire for change.

The President: I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

Before giving the floor to Council members, I should like to highlight the presence in the Chamber of the new Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations, Ambassador Karen Pierce, and, on behalf of all members of the Council, to extend a warm welcome to her.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to welcome Ms. Karen Pierce as the new Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations. We wish her great success in her post and would like to

affirm that she can count on the same full support and cooperation that we extended to her predecessor. We welcome her to New York.

I would like to express our gratitude and recognition to Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, who provided us with a very complete, clear and detailed briefing on the current situation in the Middle East, which focused on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), on the Palestinian question.

Aware of the intensity and the extent of the destruction of the current conflicts in the Middle East, for which we desire a prompt resolution, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea would like to point out that, since it was first put on the agenda of the General Assembly in April 1947 to the present time, the Palestinian question has not ceased to be at the heart of the instability of the region due to its historical complications and implications, its longevity and, in particular, a lack of proper implementation of resolutions adopted by the Security Council in that regard.

Resolution 2334 (2016) reiterates the appeal of the Quartet for Middle East peace to both parties involved in the conflict to adopt measures to reverse the negative trend on the ground, which jeopardizes the solution of two independent States — one Israeli and the other Palestinian — called on to live together in mutual cooperation and compelled to guarantee sustainable peace and security for the two States and for other parties in the region. However, some developments on the ground seek to put that objective far beyond our reach.

Equatorial Guinea believes the historic claims of the Palestinians to be just, in line with the various declarations of the African Union. We also believe that Israel has the right to live in peace and security. The Israelis should recognize that just as Israel's right to exist cannot be denied, nor can that of Palestine. Violent behaviour should cease once and for all and each party should fulfil its international obligations as set out in the various United Nations resolutions in general. The parties should refrain from unilateral actions that could hinder the return to negotiations.

The reunification of Palestine under a single, legitimate and democratic Government is also key to envisaging the aspirations of the Palestinian people as one, which would in part facilitate the mediation role of the Security Council. We therefore welcome the reconciliation agreement between Fatah and Hamas, signed in Cairo in October of last year, as well as the return of the Palestinian Authority to the Gaza Strip to resume its control.

Now more than ever, the Security Council and the entire international community must remain united in their desire to see a peaceful solution to all aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Only in that way can we bring due pressure to bear on the Israeli and Palestinian authorities to stop the trends that threaten the process and ask them to be adequately flexible and reasonable in understanding once and for all that peace is a much more valuable goal than the violence, hate and injustice that have characterized the region for more than half a century.

I would like to conclude my statement by expressing the strong desire of the Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea to see the current initiatives for a peace plan of the Government of the United States result in a tangible peace plan that is acceptable to all parties involved in the conflict and thereby to bring about peace among the Israelis and Palentinians, which is so desired.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We join the Permanent Representative of Equatorial Guinea in welcoming the new Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom. We wish her every success in her new post. We would also like to thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing.

The Plurinational State of Bolivia attends this meeting on the first quarterly report of 2018 on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), which mentions the illegality of Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. As on previous occasions, the situation on the ground is discouraging. The evident breach by the occupying Power, Israel, of the resolution in clear violation of international law and the more than 700 General Assembly resolutions adopted since 1948 and the 86 Security Council resolutions is a source of concern.

According to the declaration of the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, on 4 February, his Government has decided to build 350 new housing units in the settlement of Netiv Ha'avot, which is located south of the city of Bethlehem in the occupied West

Bank. Such a decision violates resolution 2334 (2016) and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, which affirms, among other things, the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force, as well as the right of people to self-determination. It moves us further from the possibility of a two-State solution.

For that reason, we reiterate our full commitment to resolution 2334 (2016), on the illegality of the Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. We once again call for the quarterly report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the resolution to be in written format, which would allow us to know about its implementation in detail, and for the presentation of updated maps of all settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. In that connection, Bolivia calls on contributors to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to continue to provide their invaluable support of humanitarian assistance to more than 1 million people in Gaza and, in general, to the approximately 5 million Palestinian refugees in countries in the region.

Bolivia calls for intra-Palestinian unity and for a strengthened presence of the Palestinian Authority in the Gaza Strip. In that regard, we strongly condemn the attack on the head of the Palestinian Government, Mr. Rami Hamdallah, on 13 March during his visit to the region. We condemn all forms of terrorism, whatever their origin, and we consider all imposition of ideas through force and violence to be unacceptable.

We express our firm commitment to all international efforts seeking a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In that regard, we support such initiatives as the Quartet road map, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and others that seek to ensure a just, lasting peace that will allow both peoples to live within recognized and secure borders. Bolivia is convinced that the only long-term option for the resolution of the conflict is the two-State solution, in which we finally see the establishment of a free, sovereign and independent Palestine with pre-1967 international borders and east Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

Mr. Dah (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his quarterly report on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. My delegation also wishes to welcome the new Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom, and assures her of its support.

Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its concern about the lack of significant progress in the peace process in the Middle East. It reaffirms its principled position that only credible political dialogue and negotiations between the parties will lead to the viable solution of two States living side by side in peace and security, based on the mutual recognition of the legitimate rights of both parties. It therefore calls for a resumption of talks between Israelis and Palestinians, in keeping with the relevant Council resolutions with a view to breaking the current political impasse.

The socioeconomic, political and humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip also remains worrisome and critical. On the economic front, my delegation remains concerned about persistent youth unemployment in the context of an acute economic crisis aggravated by the lack of water, electricity and medicine.

On the political and humanitarian front, the resurgent tensions between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas hamper the return of the Palestinian Authority to the Gaza Strip and undermine national reconciliation efforts between the two entities. In that connection, my delegation condemns the 13 March attack on the convoy of Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah in the Gaza Strip. We urge the Palestinian parties to show restraint and to conduct all necessary investigations to apprehend the perpetrators of the attack. We encourage the parties to pursue dialogue to ensure the effective return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza, in accordance with the reconciliation agreement signed in October, in order to better manage the humanitarian situation.

In the context of ever-decreasing contributions to the budget of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), my delegation welcomes the significant financial contribution of $100 million made during the Extraordinary Ministerial Conference in support of UNRWA on 15 March in Rome. It thanks Member States for the show of active solidarity with the Palestinian people and refugees at a time when UNRWA is experiencing the most serious financial crisis in its history. It encourages the international community, including relevant humanitarian agencies, civil society and the private sector to contribute in order to bridge the lack of financing.

In conclusion, my delegation unreservedly commits to the goal of lasting comprehensive peace in the Middle East and reiterates in readiness to work alongside Council members to bring about a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian crisis.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to start by joining those who preceded me in congratulating and welcoming Ambassador Karen Pierce, the new Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom, and wishing her every success.

I thank Mr. Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his valuable briefing today. We would like to express our full support for his work with his team and for the work of the United Nations regarding the monitoring of developments related to the issue under consideration.

In his briefing, Mr. Mladenov spoke of the deteriorating situation in the occupied territories while Israel, the occupying Power, continues to violate international law and undermine international efforts to achieve peace based on a two-State solution. The fact that Israel is not shouldering its responsibilities at the international level as the occupying Power — based on the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention — and that it does not comply with, and even disregards, United Nations resolutions demonstrates that Israel does not heed the decisions of the international community. This is the main reason behind the humanitarian tragedy that has befallen the unarmed Palestinian people, which obviously only fuels tensions in the region. The Palestinian question is still at the heart of the regional conflict, so it is essential to focus on this matter rather than on other issues, regardless of their importance.

We condemn all unilateral Israeli policies, actions and measures that seek to change the situation on the ground in order to create a new status quo and to undermine the two-State solution based on the 1967 borders. Israel, the occupying Power, pursues its aggressive policies and provocative and unilateral measures that contravene Security Council resolutions and international conventions. We remind the Council of the serious potential consequences of the decision to transfer of the United States embassy to Jerusalem on 14 May. That decision is null and void since it is in explicit contravention of resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 476 (1980), 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016).

In violating Security Council resolutions, particularly 2334 (2016), Israel, the occupying Power, is maintaining its expansionist, illegal and illegitimate activities, as Mr. Mladenov noted today. In that regard, we demand to see a written report on the status of the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). Here in the Council, we are dealing with an issue of 50 years of occupation. It is essential, therefore, that we talk about putting an end to the occupation as a precondition to any negotiation between the two parties to achieve a definitive, comprehensive and just solution. Indeed, partial solutions have produced no results.

Despite the challenges to reaching a two-State solution, due to the illegal and illegitimate aggressive practices and settlement policies of the occupying Power, we still believe that such a solution — based on a clear timetable, the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative, which ensures the establishment of an independent Palestinian State along the borders of 4 June 1967 and with East Jerusalem as its capital — is the only way to achieve security and stability.

We would like to express our profound concern with regard to the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza, which is a crisis that has lasted for more than a decade due to the unjust and oppressive blockade imposed by the occupying forces of Israel. Mr. Mladenov noted its serious implications today. The blockade enshrines Israel's practices and violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. On this point, I recall the war that was waged by the occupying Power against Gaza from 28 December 2008 until 18 January 2009, which destroyed a great deal of infrastructure.

We would also like to mention the financial crisis facing the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which is the worst of its kind since the Agency's creation in 1949. The crisis has a had negative impact on the Agency, which plays a pivotal and important role by providing assistance to approximately 6 million Palestinian refugees on its rolls. The Agency has contributed and continues to contribute to stability in the Middle East. The State of Kuwait reiterates the need for donors to provide UNRWA with the necessary funding so that the Agency can continue to provide its vital services to refugees and perform its humanitarian activities without politicization. Reducing funding for UNRWA will lead to a humanitarian disaster and undermine all its education, health care, infrastructure and humanitarian assistance programmes. In this regard, we welcome the initiative of Sweden, Egypt

and Jordan to convene the Extraordinary Ministerial Conference in Rome on 15 March, at which donor States pledged some $100 million to mitigate the shortfall in UNRWA's budget.

In conclusion, when we discuss the topic of the Middle East in the Security Council, we always focus on the Palestinian question. However, it is essential this morning to mention the serious escalation that we witnessed last night in the missile attack by the Houthis from Yemeni territory against several cities in Saudi Arabia, including Riyadh, Khamis Mushait, Najran and Jazan. These missiles, which indiscriminately targeted civilian and inhabited areas, were intercepted by the Saudi air defence forces. However, shrapnel did reach some inhabited areas, causing one death, numerous wounded and property damage.

The State of Kuwait condemns and denounces in the strongest terms this missile attack against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which is a violation by the Houthis of international law and of relevant Security Council resolutions. It also represents a rejection of peace and contravenes the determination of the international community to put an end to the conflict in Yemen, just as it undermines all opportunities for the international community to seek peace in the region.

The Security Council must be united in expressing its clear opposition to these attacks, which threaten regional peace and security. The State of Kuwait underscores its full support for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and for all the actions the Kingdom may take to maintain its peace and security.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I offer very many thanks to colleagues for their warm welcome, as this is the first time I take the floor as the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom. It is an enormous honour to represent the United Kingdom. It is very nice for me personally to be back in New York. I see many good friends in the Chamber, including Ambassador Mansour.

Today's debate is an important one, and I will save the bulk of my remarks for the consultations room, but I just want to make the point that improving the situation on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territories remains vital, particularly in Gaza. We endorse what the Special Coordinator said about the implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions and about the legitimate Palestinian Authority. Of course, I want to put on record our condemnation of the recent attempted assassination of Prime Minister Hamdallah. We take this opportunity once again to condemn all acts of terror.

I also want to put on record that we are going to talk about improving the situation on the ground, but that will only take us so far. I agree with previous speakers who said that a political horizon is needed so as to keep the prospect of the two-State solution alive. We support peace efforts being advanced by the United States. We look forward to seeing a plan presented at the earliest opportunity. We encourage re-engagement by all sides.

I also want to take the opportunity to follow my colleague from Kuwait and say something about the attack on Saudi Arabia by the Houthis this morning. It is a sad day today because it is the third anniversary of the conflict in Yemen, which is a conflict that has gone on too long, but it is also true that missiles fired into Saudi Arabia against civilians is dangerous and provocative, and will do nothing to help the conflict be resolved. It is against international law. We send our condolences to the Saudi people. We want to see the efforts of the United Nations on a Yemeni political process succeed. As the United Kingdom, we will give our every support to Martin Griffiths and the Secretary-General to that end.

Mr. Miller (United States of America): I will also deliver the bulk of my remarks in consultations, but I want to take the floor here to make a couple of points that it is important to raise in the open Chamber.

First, and above all, I want to extend warm welcome to the new Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom, Ambassador Pierce. We really look forward to working with her.

Secondly, due to the attack in Saudi Arabia from Yemen last night, I thought it was important to raise that matter now as well. We strongly condemn the Houthi missile attack that was aimed at several cities in Saudi Arabia. This is the kind of action that is deeply destabilizing for the region and one that we have warned about previously. Our condolences go out to the families of any who are killed or injured. We also support the right of our Saudi partners to defend their borders against these threats. We continue to call on all parties, including the Houthis, to return to political negotiations and move towards ending the war in the Yemen.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): First of all, I would like to thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing. I welcome the new Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom, Ambassador Pierce, to the Security Council.

The question of Palestine is at the core of the Middle East issue and fundamental to peace in that region. Only when the Palestinian question is fully resolved will the crisis in the Middle East be eased for good. The situation in Palestine and Israel is tense at present. Settlement construction continues. Violence is increasing incrementally. The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is dire. China is worried about all of these things.

We call on the Security Council and the international community to remain united in an effort to advance the political settlement of the question of Palestine. We believe that the two-State solution is the right way to resolve the question of Palestine. The international community should uphold the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative, and on that basis redouble its efforts to relaunch the negotiations, faithfully implement resolution 2334 (2016), put an end to settlement activities in the occupied territories and prevent violence against civilians. All parties should remain calm, exercise restraint and meet each other halfway. That will help foster the conditions necessary for the resumption of dialogue. Parties with major influence in the Middle East should also play a constructive role in that regard.

China remains committed to supporting and facilitating the Middle East peace process. We support the establishment of a sovereign and independent Palestinian State on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. China will continue to actively promote the four-point proposal put forward by Chinese President Xi Jinping to promote the resolution of the question of Palestine, calling for the advancement of the political process on the basis of the two-State solution; adherence to the philosophy of shared, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security; greater coordination of international efforts to maximize synergy for peace; and a holistic approach to achieving peace through development. China will continue to play a constructive role in the Middle East peace process. China remains open to any initiative or effort aimed at achieving a political settlement of the Palestinian question, easing the tensions between Palestine and Israel, and facilitating the achievement of the two-State solution.

The question of Jerusalem is complex and delicate and must be addressed as a fundamental issue within the broader Palestinian question. All parties should respect its multifaceted history, uphold fairness and justice, implement international consensus, strive for peaceful coexistence and act in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions so as to reach a solution that accommodates all the interests of all parties through final-status negotiations. Palestine and Israel should respect each other's right to existence and avoid any action that may aggravate the current situation.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has played an indispensable role in alleviating the humanitarian crisis in the occupied territories. China welcomes the success of the UNRWA Extraordinary Ministerial Conference on financing, which was recently held in Rome. We call on all parties to scale up their support for UNRWA and countries hosting Palestinian refugees so as to steadily improve the humanitarian conditions in which the refugees are living.

The meeting rose at 11 a.m.